

LAHWN

LEEDS ARTS HEALTH
AND WELLBEING
NETWORK

Creative Health in Leeds: a summary

April 2025



The collective voice for
the health and care
third sector in Leeds

Delivered in partnership by:



Background

Leeds Arts Health and Wellbeing Network (LAHWN) commissioned this report in conjunction with the Leeds City Council Culture Programmes Team to gain insight into the Leeds landscape for Creative Health, better understand the needs for sector development and build on the legacy of LEEDS2023.

This summary presents an overview of the findings of research conducted by Voluntary Action Leeds and Forum Central around a core question:

“What are the current strengths, opportunities and challenges for practitioners and organisations in Leeds working in the creative health space?”

Data was collected in different ways, including:



70

structured survey responses



8

semi-structured interviews



6

freelancers attending a focus group

Reaching an estimated

30%

of registered third sector organisations working in arts, culture and heritage in Leeds...



...and comparable with the **‘Creative Health: UK State of the Sector Survey’** findings.

Recommendations

Although recommendations are set out below in relation to each set of stakeholders, many of the recommendations **overlap**. Taking a joined-up, strategic approach will give Leeds the best chance of maximising the value of creative health activity across the city.

For commissioners and funders

Priority should be given to improving the sustainability and maximising the potential of **cultural venues** in recognition of their value as community assets and the role they play in supporting the health and wellbeing of Leeds residents.

Longer-term, flexible funding models

would support with the sustainability of creative health initiatives in line with community needs, as well as:

- A more **asset-based approach** to community development
- The development of stronger, **evidence-led** projects
- Greater **integration** with Leeds' health and care system

Funders and commissioners of creative health activities should consider the use of both **qualitative and quantitative monitoring** and creative evaluation methods to capture the full impact of health interventions. Funders should adopt a pragmatic approach, proportionate to the level of investment..

Explore funding opportunities to support the development and sustainability of **long-term collaborations**.

For LAHWN and wider partners

A diverse creative health offer can help ensure that interventions are inclusive and beneficial for communities across Leeds. **Mapping and better communicating** the breadth and impact of the creative health offer could support stakeholders in making better informed decisions about engagement and addressing local needs.

Explore ways for larger, established organisations to act as cultural '**anchor institutions**,' mentoring and supporting smaller grassroots groups. These arrangements could provide **reciprocal benefit**, supporting grassroots groups around sustainability and in turn supporting larger organisations to become more accessible and diversify their reach.

Consider the development of a central resource of **locally generated, accessible evidence**, documenting the impact of creative health activities on person centred health and wellbeing outcomes

Explore opportunities to **influence funding and commissioning plans** at the local and regional level through the use of collated evidence.



For policymakers and system partners:

Explore opportunities to promote stronger collaboration between **primary care, community health teams** and providers of creative health activities as part of local health offers. Integrating these approaches may help reduce barriers to healthcare access, with national and local commitments to **neighbourhood health** offering a possible pathway forward.

Explore mechanisms to connect **Population Health, Public Health** and other teams working at the **neighbourhood level** with arts and culture organisations, including establishing stronger links to Local Care Partnerships.

Explore opportunities to offer **training, peer learning, mentoring, coaching and support** for creative health organisations, including freelancers and small-scale groups. This may help to:

- Strengthen their ability to navigate funding applications, project management, and administrative tasks.
- Mitigate the impact of the work on facilitator health and wellbeing.

Building on existing tools and resources, consider developing and embedding a **shared impact framework** for creative health in Leeds.



[Read the full report](#)



SCAN ME

Key learning

Geographic spread

- There appears to be greater levels of creative health activity in Leeds priority wards, as well as clustered around cultural venues.
- Respondents highlighted the ways creative health activities can be tailored to meet local community and cultural contexts to a greater degree than more traditional health interventions.



When people are creating something, they're not just patients or service users—they're artists, dancers, writers. It gives them a different sense of self.



The Perceived Role of Creative Health

- Respondents consistently outlined the role Creative Health activity plays in improving mental and physical wellbeing by supporting non-verbal emotional expression, reducing isolation and making movement more accessible and enjoyable.
- It was perceived that participation in creative activities builds confidence, strengthens social connections and could provide a stepping stone toward employment.



We get told, 'That's lovely, but it's not real therapy.' But for some people, this is what keeps them going.



The Creative Health Offer in Leeds

- Respondents stated that creative health activities could provide an alternative to traditional NHS services: offering people a safe space for self-expression, confidence-building and social connection, particularly for those who face barriers in NHS settings.
- Respondents believed that wider recognition around the value of creative health activities could enable creative health to integrate more into 'mainstream' health and care support, which in turn would also support the longer-term sustainability of delivery.

Funding and Sustainability

- Organisations' reliance on short-term, project-based funding can lead to a lack of recognition of the creative health offer and significantly impact organisations' capacity for delivery, continuous improvement and development.
- Whilst income diversification was seen as helpful, it was not felt to be a complete solution to sustainability challenges. As organisations explore alternative funding sources, grant and contract funding remains crucial in safeguarding support for marginalised communities.

Workforce

- Creative health practitioners working on a freelance basis talked about facing significant emotional strain from working with vulnerable individuals, yet they often lacked structured supervision or support. This was perceived as contributing to staff burnout and high staff turnover.
- Organisations talked about a need for further staff training and development. Key areas of staff development may include mental health and wellbeing, trauma-informed practice, as well as organisational skills such as grant writing and impact evaluation.



Evaluation

- Findings indicated that creative health organisations are highly skilled in evaluating their work, but there was a perception that funders and policymakers often focus solely on quantitative data. This means the broader qualitative insight and full scope of the impact of creative health activity is often overlooked.
- Creative evaluation approaches such as storytelling and non-verbal tools were seen as promoting more meaningful and inclusive data collection, particularly for those facing language or literacy barriers.

“
As facilitators, we take on a lot, and we have our own difficulties... finding supervision for ourselves is difficult.

Networks and Partnerships

- Organisations talked about prioritising working with community venues and partners to ensure creative health activities were accessible and relevant to diverse audiences.
- While organisations valued long-term partnerships, organisations also stated that there was a lack of funding dedicated to partnership building.



“
The partnership work we do with our community partners allows us to reach audiences we wouldn't be able to access in any other way.

”

With thanks to all the organisations and practitioners that contributed to this work, including:

Arts & Minds
Aspire CBS
Balbir Singh Dance Company
Barca Leeds - Better Together
BasementArtsProject
Belle Isle Senior Action - BISA
Bramley Mermaids
British Library
CCACP (Meeting Point)
Cloth Cat Studios Ltd
Complete Woman CIC
Creative Frame CIC
Dance Action Zone Leeds (DAZL)
East Leeds Project
Edek's Doodle Chat
Feel Good Factor
Getaway Girls
GIPSIL
Groundwork Yorkshire
Halton Moor and Osmondthorpe
Project for Everyone (HOPE)
Hamara
Hollin Lane Allotments Association
Humans Being
Karma dance(Mental Health &
Trauma) CIC
Leeds City Council - Public Health
Leeds combined arts
Leeds International Piano Competition
Leeds Mind
Leeds Museums and Galleries
Leeds Older People's Forum
Leeds Playhouse
Leeds Refugee Forum
Leeds Wood Recycling
Little London Arts

Mafwa Theatre
Mens Health Unlocked
MHA Communities Horsforth
National Poetry Centre
Northern School of
Contemporary Dance
Old Chapel Music CIC
Opera North
People in Action
Photo North Festival
Purple Patch Arts
Pyramid
Royal Armouries
SARSVL
Season Well
Seasons
Skippko Arts Team
Slung Low
South Asian Arts UK (SAA-uk)
Space2
Sue Ryder
Sunken Studio
Thackray Museum of Medicine
The Big Life Group
The DV&A Voices Project, LDVS
The Highrise Project
The Performance Ensemble
Touchstone
University of Leeds
Vandan Group
Vera Media
Vivo
Walk It Ride It - LCC
Yorkshire Dance
Your Back Yard

Steering group members

Adie Nivison
Dawn Fuller
Esther Amis - Hughes
Geraldine Montgomerie
Jen Rhodes
Naomi Roxby Wardle
Paul Bollom
Prof Persephone Sextou
Roger Harrington

Find out more

Leeds Arts Health and Wellbeing Network (LAHWN)

Join LAHWN as an organisation or individual.

Visit www.lahwn.co.uk



You can find out more about who we are by scanning the QR code

SCAN ME

